

**TESTIMONY OF DR. KENNETH E. PETERSEN  
ASSISTANT ADMINISTRATOR, OFFICE OF FIELD OPERATIONS  
FOOD SAFETY AND INSPECTION SERVICE  
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
BEFORE THE  
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE**

**May 9, 2007**

Good morning, Mr. Chairman, Congressman Goodlatte and other Members of the Committee. I am the Assistant Administrator for Field Operations for the Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the ongoing investigation of the animal feed supplemented with pet food scraps containing melamine and melamine-related compounds. I am pleased to be here today with my colleague, Dr. David Acheson, from the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) of the United States Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

Before I get into details, let me begin by emphasizing that FSIS takes very seriously its responsibilities to ensure the safety of meat, poultry, and processed egg products. We do not believe the current incident poses a threat to human health, and we are not aware of any human illnesses that have ever been linked to melamine or melamine related compounds.

In my testimony today, I hope to achieve three goals. First, I will provide you with a brief description of FSIS responsibilities as they relate to this issue. Second, I will describe FSIS actions in response to this incident, including some background on the science behind our decisions. Finally, I will outline our next steps in this ongoing investigation.

**FSIS' Mission**

Our mission at FSIS is to ensure that meat, poultry, and processed egg products distributed in commerce for use as human food are safe, secure, wholesome, and accurately labeled. FSIS is charged with administering and enforcing the Federal Meat Inspection Act, the Poultry Products Inspection Act, the Egg Products Inspection Act, portions of the Agricultural Marketing Act, and the regulations that implement these laws. FSIS also ensures compliance with the Humane Methods of Slaughter Act, which requires that all livestock be handled and slaughtered in a humane manner. The Agency is responsible for determining equivalence to federal standards at the state level and among our foreign trading partners.

We work closely with our sister agencies – such as the FDA – to ensure that the U.S. food supply remains the safest in the world. Essentially, our Agency is charged with ensuring the safety of the meat, poultry, and processed egg product supply once animals leave the farms for the slaughter and processing establishments – we inspect each animal at slaughter before applying the mark of inspection. We also inspect all processing establishments to ensure sanitary and other regulatory requirements are met.

Our inspection program personnel form the backbone of FSIS' public health infrastructure in laboratories, plants, and import houses throughout the country. In FY 2006, the Agency had approximately 7,600 full-time personnel protecting the public health in 6,000 federally-inspected establishments nationwide where FSIS inspection program personnel performed antemortem and postmortem inspection procedures to ensure public health requirements were met in the processing of over 46 billion pounds of livestock carcasses, almost 57 billion pounds of poultry carcasses, and about 4.4 billion pounds of liquid egg products. Approximately 60 cents of every food dollar in the United States is spent on foods that FSIS inspects.

In FY 2006, FSIS inspection program personnel conducted more than eight million procedures to verify that establishments met food safety and wholesomeness requirements. In addition, during FY 2006, approximately 3.9 billion pounds of meat and poultry and about 5.9 million pounds of egg products were presented for import inspection at U.S. ports and borders. FSIS also has Program Investigators nationwide who conduct food safety, food defense, and outbreak investigations and enforcements.

### **FSIS' Role Responding to Melamine in Animal Feed**

FSIS has been working cooperatively with the FDA on the investigation into swine and poultry feed containing imported wheat flour contaminated with melamine and melamine related compounds.

FSIS was first alerted by the FDA on April 19 to the possibility that contaminated pet food scraps may have been used in animal feed by producers of food animals. Since that initial contact, FSIS has been assisting FDA with the investigation, including on-site visits to farms and daily communication with State and local officials.

By April 26, investigative results confirmed that a relatively limited number of hogs had consumed contaminated feed. At that time, FSIS joined FDA in alerting the public that adulterated feed had been fed to some hogs, and assured them that those hogs would not be allowed to enter the food supply until we could conduct the necessary scientific work to make a safety determination. Due to the limited information available at the time, USDA could not determine whether it was appropriate to place the mark of inspection on food products derived from these animals. Accordingly, we worked with states and producers to quarantine or hold the animals until further notice. FSIS was also working to determine what, if any, product had entered commerce. USDA announced that if the identified animals needed to be depopulated, producers would be compensated for those costs.

On April 30, USDA and FDA announced that the agencies had learned that pet food scraps from pet food manufactured with wheat flour contaminated with melamine and melamine-related compounds had been sold to a limited number of farms for use as supplements in chicken feed. As with exposure from pork products, we believed that humans were highly unlikely to become ill from consuming poultry products produced

from chickens that had consumed feed supplemented with pet food scraps contaminated with melamine and melamine-related compounds.

However, as was the case with the swine, because the feed in question was contaminated, and given the information that was available at that time, FSIS could not apply the mark of inspection. Therefore, the Agency determined that chickens fed the contaminated chicken feed would not be approved to enter the human food supply, pending further investigation. As with the hogs, chickens on the affected farms were held voluntarily by the producers at the request of Federal and State authorities.

This past Monday, May 7, FSIS determined that the mark of inspection could now be placed on meat and poultry products when the animals are from farms traced to contaminated feed that, when sampled, tested negative.

This determination was made after a risk assessment was conducted by scientists from FDA, FSIS, CDC, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and the Department of Homeland Security. The risk assessment found that consuming meat from hogs and chickens known to have been fed animal feed supplemented with pet food scraps that contained melamine and melamine-related compounds represent a very low risk to human health. In the most extreme risk assessment scenario, the scientists assumed the unlikely event that *all* the solid food a person consumes in an entire day was contaminated with melamine. Even then, the potential exposure was about 2,500 times lower than the dose considered safe; well below any level of public health concern.

As I've already mentioned, FDA and USDA have confirmed that scraps of contaminated pet food that contained only low levels of melamine were distributed to farms in a limited number of States and added to swine and poultry feed. These scraps constituted only a small percentage of the farm animal rations. In addition, melamine is known to be excreted in animal urine. When exposure levels are much higher, as was the case with cats and dogs, the melamine and its compounds appear to cause the formation of crystals, resulting in kidney damage. There is no indication of kidney damage in hogs. Both hogs and chickens known to have consumed contaminated feed appear to be healthy.

The assessment that the risk to human health is very low is based on a number of factors, including the dilution of the contaminating melamine and melamine-related compounds from the original concentrate as it moves through the food system. First, it is a partial ingredient in pet food; second, it is only part of the total feed given to the hogs and poultry; third, it is not known to accumulate in the bodies of animals; fourth, even if present in pork or poultry, pork and poultry are only a small part of the average American diet. Neither FDA nor FSIS has uncovered any evidence of harm to swine or poultry from the contaminated feed.

This dilution factor was an important piece of data considered in the multi-agency science-based human risk assessment and helps to support the conclusion that there is

very low risk to human health from eating meat from animals that were fed the contaminated product.

### **Current Status**

As soon as the situation arose, we ensured that swine and poultry on farms known to have received or suspected of receiving contaminated feed that had tested positive for melamine and melamine-related compounds were held under State quarantine or voluntarily by the owners. As the investigation has proceeded, we now know that, in several cases, on-farm feed samples have tested negative for melamine and related compounds. These tests were conducted by federal or State laboratories using approved methods. Most likely because only very small amounts of the contaminated feed were mixed with other rations, the melamine and related compounds were no longer detectable. USDA has concluded that, based on the human risk assessment and the inability to detect melamine in the feed samples, these animals no longer need to be quarantined or withheld from processing.

In other cases, feed samples have tested positive for melamine and related compounds; feed samples were not available; or feed samples have not yet been submitted for testing. These animals continue to be withheld from processing, but are not yet being culled, pending the results of the animal risk assessment. New scientific information is expected to be completed soon -- hopefully within one week. Upon completion of further risk

assessment information, USDA will determine whether these animals can be released for inspection and further processing.

If animals are not released for inspection and are euthanized, Section 32 funds can be made available to restore farmers' purchasing power. USDA is also offering the expertise and assistance of Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) personnel in carrying out depopulation activities, to ensure animals are euthanized and disposed of in accordance with federal and State laws.

### **Next Steps**

USDA and FDA continue working together to conduct a full and comprehensive investigation. As additional information is confirmed, updates will be provided and decisions will be made using the best available science to protect the public's health. We will also make the risk assessment available for public comment. The scientists that worked on the first risk assessment are now compiling a scientific assessment of the risk to animal health associated with the ingestion of animal feed containing melamine and its compounds. We are also now in the process of identifying a group of experts to convene a scientific advisory board that would be charged with reviewing the risk assessment. This group would also be asked to contribute to future scientific analysis related to the risk of melamine and its compounds to humans and animals.



We recognize how important it is to communicate with our stakeholders, our partners and the general public in an open and transparent manner. Throughout the ongoing investigation with FDA, we have been sharing information with State departments of agriculture and State veterinarians. We continue to keep trading partners informed through the Foreign Agricultural Service. We have been updating our stakeholders from industry and consumer organizations. We have been working with the FDA to keep the general public informed. We will continue to reach out to our stakeholders, our partners and the general public to keep them informed as the investigation continues and provide the opportunity for them to provide comments for our consideration. And we will continue to keep Congress informed of our ongoing investigations.

Thank you again for providing me with the opportunity to address the Committee on this issue. I would be happy to respond to any questions you have